

Sociology News

Summer 2026 Edition

Department of Sociology, Case Western Reserve University

Letter from the Chair

Dear Sociology Friends,

I am very pleased to share this newsletter with you featuring the exciting, intellectually stimulating, and even fun aspects of our department. First off, we learned this year of a substantial gift to the Department of Sociology from double alumna Dr. Sandy Christie ('76, '83) to support graduate student education. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Christie to learn about her time in Sociology and her path-breaking career. She has a particular passion for helping to remove barriers that graduate students, particularly female graduate students, can face in completing their degrees and becoming successful professionals. You can read more about Dr. Christie and her generous gift on page 2.

We have some notable faculty news to share. This spring, Professor Mary Erdmans announced her decision to retire, effective at the end of the 25-26 academic year. While Mary will be missed by us, she may be too busy in new her new phase of full-time writing to miss us! See page 3 for a description of her productive career. We also said farewell to Rebecca Schut as her career took her in a new direction. I am pleased to report, though, that alumnus Dr. Michael Slone will be joining our faculty starting this fall as a full-time Lecturer. Welcome Mike!

Our Sociology majors and minors continue to make waves! Congratulations to Heaven Griffith who was awarded the prestigious James Dysart Macgee award for Outstanding Social Science Student. Read on page 8 about her future plans. WRAP, the student club that formed out of Professor Black's Mass Incarceration course, is operating a public archive featuring the artwork of persons who are incarcerated. You can read more and visit the archive on page 10.

Our faculty and the graduate students are engaged in a wide array of impactful projects, from climate justice to disability accommodations for "invisible" conditions to loneliness among LGBTQ older adults. We also have several awardees to celebrate, such as Cassi Pittman Claytor as a CWRU Sustainability Champion and multiple awards for our graduate students on page 9.

Take a moment to peruse our Sociology News to see the exciting things happening all over the department! And, as always, we'd love to hear from you! Drop us a line and let us know what you are working on, thinking about, or achieving!

Cheers, Jessica

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Sociology Alumna Sandy Christie Pledges Gift to Support Graduate Students



Sandy Christie, Ph.D. (GRS '76, '83, Sociology) has committed \$2 million to establish the Sandy Christie Scholarship Fund, expanding access and support for graduate students pursuing their studies in Sociology at CWRU. In addition to providing scholarships, the fund will help offset educational expenses, including childcare, that can present barriers to pursuing an advanced degree – support Christie says was critical during her own academic journey.

Dr. Christie recounted “unexpected kindnesses” shown her during her academic journey, from a faculty member finding a place to store and practice her piano on campus to another faculty member finding additional funding to support her research. She is particularly sensitive to invisible barriers that women may face in their pursuit of higher education and professional jobs, hence her gift allows for assistance in those unexpected ways that may slow a graduate student’s career.



Christie had brief stints in both academia and the corporate world before co-founding and leading a research and consulting business for two decades. Working primarily in healthcare, higher education and politics, Christie broke through the glass ceiling in an industry in which she was frequently the only woman in the room.

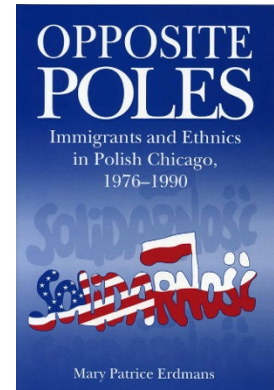
I know you will want to join me in expressing our sincere thanks to Dr. Christie, whose gift will provide important resources for our graduate program for years to come.

Professor Mary Erdmans Retires

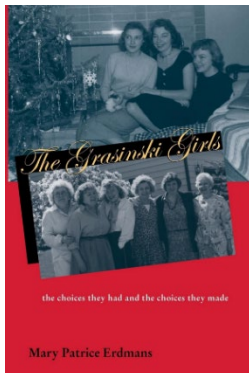


Professor Erdmans earned her Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1992. Her first position was in the Department of Sociology at University of North Carolina, Greensboro where she was promoted to Associate Professor. In 2002, she joined the faculty of the Department of Sociology at Central Connecticut State University, where she was promoted to Professor. Professor Erdmans came to Case Western Reserve University in 2012 where she is ending her career as Professor of Sociology.

Professor Erdmans' prolific writing career has focused, though not exclusively, at the intersection of immigration, social movements, and ethnicity. Her first book, *Opposite Poles: Immigrants and Ethnics in Polish Chicago*, focused on collective action among the Polish American community in Chicago and the newly arrived Polish refugees from the Solidarity movement in Poland. Her second award-winning book, *The Grasiński Girls*, showcased Erdmans' strengths as a life history interviewer to explore the lives of her mother and her five sisters as they navigated their lives as white working-class women in 20th century America. Here she examines how gendered habitus, class location, and ethnic identity shaped their life choices and their agency. Both of these books were awarded the Oscar Halecki Prize by the Polish American Historical Association. Her third book (with Timothy Black), *On Becoming a Teen Mom*, directly challenged the conservative

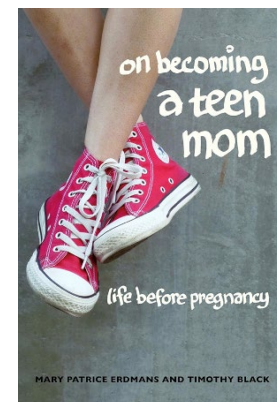


cultural narrative of teen births as an origin of social problems. Instead, they document the life circumstances that led up to the pregnancy, finding significant challenges such as failure of school policies but also largely invisible gender disparities that ensnare even the “girl next door.” Their intersectional approach to understanding the context of teen pregnancy garnered multiple awards from the American Sociological Association and the Association for Humanist Sociology.



In her most recent project, Professor Erdmans focuses on political refugees from the Solidarity movement who returned to Poland after the collapse of the communist regime, examining social remittances, political transnationalism, and activism over the life course. She was awarded a Fulbright Scholar Fellowship in 2019 to support the collection of life story interviews with these return refugees. The project is nearing completion with her manuscript *Life is Brutal* completed, and second one, tentatively entitled *A Rebellious Generation*, in draft. Retirement is coming at a good time for her!

Professor Erdmans is a dedicated teacher and mentor. At CWRU, students have benefited from her training in courses such as Social Inequality, Social Movements, and Narrative Methods. She served as Director or Co-Director of Undergraduate Studies, Senior Capstone Advisor, and mentored countless students in dissertations and independent research projects. Professionally, she has been active in the Association of Humanist Sociologists and American Sociological Association, but perhaps most visibly in the Polish American Historical Association. She was elected President for two terms, served on their Board of Directors for three decades, and was book review Editor for *Polish American Studies* for twelve years.



She will continue to live and work in Cleveland Heights, with her husband Timothy Black and their new dog Rosie.

Dannefer Completes Two-Year Term as President of Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies

At their annual meeting in Brussels in June, Professor Dale Dannefer handed over the gavel after a two-year term as President of Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies. He presided this year's meeting and the 2025 meeting in Fribourg, Switzerland, and will continue as part of the executive committee for another year in the role of Past President. SLLS is an interdisciplinary organization that brings together scholars interested in the social dynamics of human development and aging, largely through the study of panel and large-scale cohort studies. The organization has a strong focus on methods for analyzing longitudinal data and offers training workshops all year long. In 2023, Dannefer and Jessica Kelley hosted the SLLS annual meeting at CWRU. It was the first meeting of the organization outside of Europe. Dannefer will continue his role as Section Editor for the SLLS organization's journal: *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* (Bristol Press).



Pittman Claytor's Rising Visibility in Community-University Partnerships to Address Climate Change

Professor Cassi Pittman Claytor is gaining significant visibility for her work on sustainability, climate change, and social justice. In February, she was a spotlight speaker at the National Academies of Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering panel on "Higher Education's Path to Sustainability and Resilience" highlighting the roles that universities could play in climate action partnerships. She is a partner in the Cleveland Regional Decarbonization Framework, commissioned by the City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability and Climate Justice and the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency. The interdisciplinary team of scholars and practitioners is focused on marginalized and economically disadvantaged communities in the region, who can be more vulnerable to climate change. For her university-community collaborative work, she was recognized as a 2026 CWRU Faculty Sustainability Champion.



This fall, Pittman Claytor will teach SOCI 242 – Race, Climate Change, and Environmental Justice, with a community engagement component. They will focus on the local issue of the Shaker Lakes Dam and the Doan Brook Restoration project. Pittman Claytor received a CWRU Community Innovation Grant to support The Doan Brook Dialogues, the students' community-based research.

Doctoral Student Anvitha Ravipati Studying Women Farmers Who Use Sustainable Ecological Strategies



Under the mentorship of Jessica Kelley, doctoral student **Anvitha Ravipati** received a CWRU Community Innovation Grant to support part of her dissertation research. The grant is titled: “Telling Their Stories: Women Farmers at the Forefront of the Agroecological Movement in NE Ohio.” The project highlights feminist frames of climate resilience and economic independence.

Ravipati has trained and supervises undergraduate students to conduct spatial-visual-geographic narrative interviews with women urban farmers in the Cleveland area. A community report-out event will be held at Rid-All Farms in summer 2027, featuring the women farmers and their sustainable agricultural practices.

OTHER FACULTY NEWS

Brian Gran and alumna **Anne Bryden** were appointed as Observers of the Uniform Law Commission Mental Privacy, Cognitive Biometrics, and Neural Data Study Committee. The Study Committee’s objective is to determine whether a national model law on cognitive data privacy rights is needed. Gran and Bryden were invited because of their sociological expertise on human rights and public interest technology. The Committee’s work is on-going.

Timothy Black gave two invited talks on his long-running ethnographic study that follows the lives of three Puerto Rican brothers, their families, and social networks. The talks given at University of Massachusetts-Springfield and Baystate Medical Center were titled “We weren’t supposed to live past 30’: The Life Trajectories of a Marginalized Network of Puerto Ricans.” When he completes data collection in the next year, it will be one of the longest-running ethnographic studies ever conducted in the field of Sociology, exceeding 30 years of data collection. His forthcoming book will be the follow up to *When a Heart Turns Rock Solid*, documenting the first 18 years.

Jessica Kelley received an Expanding Horizons Initiative Grant for her project titled: “A Midlife Disrupted: Spells of Serious Illness and Work Disability in Life Course Perspective.” Graduate students **John Whesu** and **Yuanchang Zhao** worked with Kelley to construct the health and work histories of more than 13,000 adults who completed Life History Surveys in the Health and Retirement Study. Alumna **Wenxuan (Cherry) Huang** conducted a workshop on Sequence Analysis and serves as mentor on the project.

Sue Hinze was interviewed by the Huffington Post for stories about continued sexism in media. In one story, she was asked about how the backlash against the Blue Origin

spaceflight of all women underscored the ongoing struggles with tokenism and under-representation of women in fields of science. “Dreaming big and reaching for the stars’ are platitudes that reinforce individualistic ideologies and ignore the weight of classist, racist and sexist systems of power that keep people from succeeding.”

Haoming Song gave an invited talk in the Zheng Liu Chair Series on Demography at Renmin University in China. His talk, titled “A Demographic Opportunity: Two Studies on Marriage and Health” focused on sexual minority populations, including two recent studies on partner selection, marriage markets, structural stigma, and mental health. Drawing on large-scale national datasets, these studies show how demographic research of a historically understudied population can provide new theoretical and empirical directions into the broader study of social inequality, age and life course, and medical sociology.

Eva Kahana’s prolific and impactful career studying older adults and aging has been honored with a named student travel award for the Gerontological Society of America. Former student Thomas Fairchild and his wife Dr. Janice Ann Knebl established an endowment with GSA for the Dr. Eva Kahana Graduate Student Travel Scholarship Award. The inaugural scholarship will be awarded in 2027.

IN AND AROUND THE DEPARTMENT



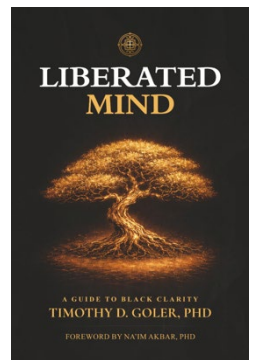
Shani Evans, a scholar at Rice University specializing in urban sociology, race & racism, and place-making, shared her newest research about how residents of a historically Black neighborhood in Portland, Oregon respond to encroaching gentrification and changing racial composition of the neighborhood. Following her talk on campus, she engaged in a community dialogue sponsored by Third Space Books and moderated by doctoral student **Marissa Gilbert**. Local residents and community activists, who are actively resisting gentrification in historically

Black neighborhoods in Cleveland like Glenville, shared their challenges and successes with Dr. Evans.



Sociology students visit with Anthony Jack, author of *Privileged Poor*, during his invited visit to CWRU

Alumnus Dr. Timothy Goler ('19) published a new book *Liberated Mind: A Guide to Black Clarity* in collaboration with National Institute for African American Health (NIAAH). Professor Goler will be speaking at the Cleveland City Club in August. He is currently Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Norfolk University.



Professor Casey Schroeder talking with prospective majors at Sociology Game Night



Professors Dannefer and Deimling with their books on display in the Dean's Office.

News from the Sociology Graduate Student Association

Dear Department of Sociology,

I am closing out my year as SGSA president. SGSA runs on community, and that kept proving true this year. Some of that is on the officers I worked with, and a lot of it is on the folks who kept choosing to be in the room with each other when none of us had any extra time. Grad school is busy and gets busier, and I am thankful for the people in our department who keep making time for each other anyway. I want to thank Amy Romanauski (Vice President), John Whesu (Vice President), Colleen Kavanagh (Treasurer), and Oluwatimileyin Aborisade (Student Representative). Most of what made this year work came from them. Some of the highlights:

Welcoming: The fall opened with the Pre-Majors Game Night on September 18, which Dr. Kelley brought us in to help facilitate. We played games with the undergrads and tried to explain what sociology actually is, which is harder than it sounds.

Writing: We ran monthly writing days all year in Old Hillel and at the Writing Center. Bagels and coffee in the morning, Chipotle or pizza for lunch, and Pomodoro timers in between. We talked about our work at the start and end



of each day, which kept things from feeling like a silent library and held us accountable to what we had said we would get done.

Community + Camaraderie: The Cedar Point trip on October 10 was one of the highlights of the year. We carpooled out after lunch and stayed late for Halloweekends. Friendsgiving on November 13 closed out the fall. Spring brought dinner at Mama Santa's on February 4, which was delicious Italian and a low-key way into the new semester, followed by a potluck game night on February 19 where I lost cleanly at a few games I had never played before. We wrapped the year on May 5 with the end-of-semester picnic. The weather did not cooperate, so we moved it indoors and ate Cilantro Taqueria.

Finally, congratulations to next year's officers: John Whesu (President), Zuo Tan (Vice President), Colleen Kavanagh (Treasurer). Oluwatimileyin Aborisade will serve again as Student Representative to the faculty meetings. It has been a real honor to do this work for our program. Over my time here I have been lucky to serve as Graduate Student Representative, Vice President, and President. I am stepping down with the kind of mixed feelings you would expect, but mostly knowing this group is going to take care of the cohorts coming in behind us.

With gratitude,

Zach Milko

Congratulations to Sociology Major Heaven Griffith!



Rising senior Sociology major Heaven Griffith received the James Dysart Magee award for outstanding social science student. This award is given to one student each year, selected from among nominees in Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, and Psychology. The award winner receives a scholarship toward their tuition or living expenses during their senior year. Heaven was the unanimous choice among the Sociology faculty to be nominated for this award.

What is Heaven up to? This summer, she is at the Advanced Individual Training to become a Paralegal Specialist for the U.S. Army. She enlisted in 2024 and hopes to attend Officer Candidate School and begin law school in Fall 2027. When asked about what she likes most about Sociology, Heaven reports being most excited about topics on inequality at the intersection of gender and race, particularly as it relates to Black women. She is also interested in studying the causes and consequences of mass incarceration. During her time at CWRU, Heaven's favorite courses have been *Race and Racism* with Professor Pittman Claytor and *Work and Family: US and Abroad* with Professor Hinze.

2026 AKD Initiates and Undergraduate Award Recipients



On April 17, 2026, six students were initiated into the Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) International Sociology Honor Society and sixteen students were recipients of Undergraduate Awards. This year's AKD initiates were Oluwatimileyin Aborisade, Mariangel Arriata, Sean Kim, Riya Patel, Sebastian Mueller, Xinyu Shi, John Whesu and Mofan Yang.

The Schermerhorn Award for outstanding students in sociology went to Regan Manning, Jared Neely and Emilia Sans-Rios. The Mark Lefton Award for excellence in sociological studies went to Mari Arrieta, Christopher Batarseh and Max Seneff. The Stella Berkeley-Friedman Award to seniors for the highest academic achievement in the study of sociology went to AJ Curcio and Isabella Nava. The Robert C. Davis Award for demonstrated commitment to sociological studies went to Elias Grayson and Tania Robinson. On behalf of the Department of Sociology, congratulations on all of your outstanding accomplishments!

Congratulations to our Graduate Award Winners!

Each spring, faculty and staff from each department nominate students for awards offered through the School of Graduate Studies.

Oluwatimilain Aborisade received a Graduate Student Appreciation Award, nominated by Professor Kahana.

Poshan Dahal was awarded a Dean's Instructional Excellence Award.

Colleen Kavanah was awarded a Dean's Instructional Excellence Award.

John Whesu was awarded the Ruth Barber Moon Award for academic promise and leadership.



Western Reserve Abolition Project Promotes Art Archive



WRAP is a student organization that grew out of Professor Black's Mass Incarceration Course in 2022. Their mission is to educate the Greater Cleveland area on the consequences of institutionalized punishment so that they may join in the path toward abolition, and ultimately research, reform, and revolutionize the prison-industrial complex in Ohio.

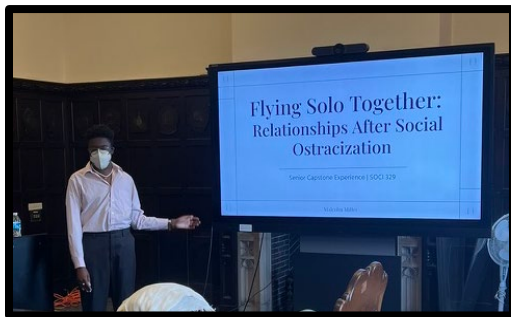
Currently the group is sponsoring the Prison Art Archive, which is a platform for featuring artwork and poetry of persons who are incarcerated. Sociology major Emilia Sanz-Rios currently maintains the archive. Follow them on Instagram: @wrap.abolition



**See the Art
Archive
Here:**

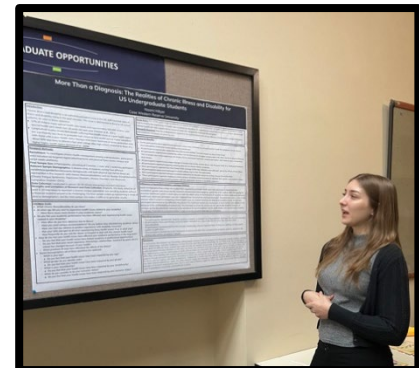


Sociology Senior Capstone Presentations



On December 13, 8 sociology majors presented their projects from the Senior Capstone Experience (SOCI 392). Led by Professor Dale Dannefer, each of these independent projects reflected the student's intellectual interests, whether going deeper into a topic they had learned in a class or applying sociological frameworks to something in their

own lived experience. The research topics addressed an array of sociological issues using both quantitative and qualitative evidence such as ethnic and racial identity among Puerto Rican young adults, the over-diagnosis of learning disorders among English-as-Second Language students, and the intersection of faith and racial identity among Black Americans. They presented their final projects at a department Capstone Day where faculty and students celebrate their accomplishments.



2026 Senior Capstone Project Presentations

"You're Black and You're Not Christian?" Influences on Faith of Black Young Adults

Myi Ferris

Living Divided: Age, Sex, and the Neighborhood in Covid-19 Diagnoses in Urban and Rural Settings

Jenny Fu

More than a Diagnosis: The Realities of Chronic Illness and Disability for US Undergraduate Students

Naomi Hillyer

Crucible of Difference: Race and Self-Perception among Puerto Rican Young Adults

Amatullah Madera

Flying Solo Together: Relationships after Social Ostracization

Malcom Miller

Introduction to Labor Market: Gen Z & Networking in the Digital Age

Tania Robinson

Unintended Consequences: Learning/Language Diagnoses on Second Generation Hispanics in the US

Emilia Sans-Rose

Navigating Hierarchies: How Caste and Gender Shape Women's Experiences in Tamil Nadu Universities

Harshini Velchamy



Congratulations to Dr. Michael Slone!

Dissertation Title:

Crowd Control: Platform Capitalism and the Labor Process

Advisor: Professor Tim Black

Selected 2025-2026 Conference Presentations

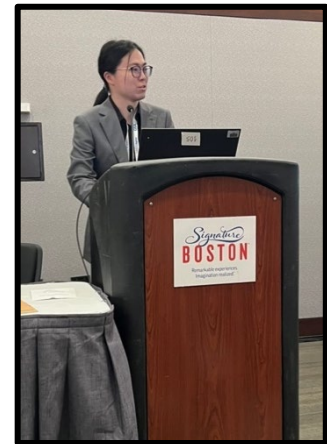
Aborisade, Oluwatimileyin. "Surveillance Technology and Racialized Policing: How Data-Driven Policing Reinforces Racial Disparities in the U.S." American Sociological Association in Chicago 2025

Dahal, Poshan. "Relationship between Physical Health, Disability, and Geriatric Syndromes and Depressive Symptoms in Older Adults." Gerontological Society of America 2025

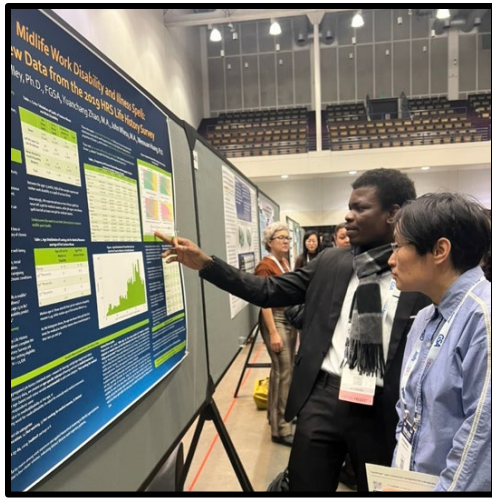
Dannefer, Dale and Christopher Phillipson (Symposium Organizers). "Exploitation and Resistance: Emerging Issues in Theory and Practice in Emancipatory Gerontology." International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics. Amsterdam 2026

Dale Dannefer and Stephen Crystal (Symposium Organizers). "Cumulative Dis/Advantage in a Changing World: Structural and Policy Impacts." Gerontological Society of America. 2025.

Freeman, Kate J., Laura Q. Wilkinson, and Jeremy Brenner-Levoy. "Playing with Care: Queer Masculinities, Carework, and Online Gaming." North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Conference 2025.



Hinze, Susan. "Fundamental Cause and Consequence: Race, Gender and Spinal Cord Injury by Gunshot in Urban America." American Sociological Association 2025.



Kavanah, Colleen. 'We'd Have to Accommodate Every Woman in The Office:' Gendered Barriers to Disability Accommodations for People with Endometriosis." Eastern Sociological Society 2026

Kelley, Jessica. John T. Whesu, Yuanchang Zhao, Wenxuan Huang. "Midlife Work Disability and Illness Spells: New Data from the HRS 2019 Life History Survey." Gerontological Society of America 2025

Pittman Claytor, Cassi. "Black and Plugged In: An examination of Black EV owners and their attitudes about sustainability, climate change, and

environmental justice." European Sociological Association 2026

Ravipati, Anvitha. "Agroecology versus Conventional Farming: Seven Claims in Dialectical Tension." Southern Sociological Society 2026.

Rivera, Jacob. "Environmental Justice for the Rural Middle-Class: Examining the Energy Crisis in Cayey, Puerto Rico." Environmental Sociology Mini-Conference, Eastern Sociological Society 2026.

Romanauski, Amy and Brian Gran. "US Public Policy, Human Rights, and Health Literacy: A Systematic Review." North Central Sociological Association 2026

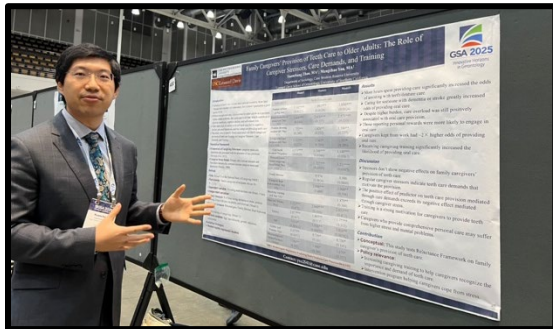


Song, Haoming. "Revisiting Earning and Housework among Same-Sex Couples: Testing Theories of Bargaining and Autonomy." International Sociological Association Research Committee on Social Stratification and Mobility 2025



Whesu, John, Abolade Oladimeji, Seun Ajoseh, Oluwatimileyin Aborisade, and Olugbenga Okunade. "Unequal Beginnings: Assessing Gender and Race/Ethnicity Disparities in Functional Limitations Across Early Adulthood and Midlife." Population Association of America 2026

Whesu, John. "Reproductive Weathering in an Era of Rising Maternal Age: Implications for Low Birthweight and Macrosomia Across Race/Ethnicity." North Central Sociological Association 2026



Zhao, Yuanchang and Mengzhao Yan. "Factors Associated with Family Caregivers' Provision of Teeth Care: Willingness and Reluctance to Provide Care." Gerontological Society of America 2025

Zhou, Nan. "Relative Scarcity, Depression and CDA in China and the US: Age Period or Cohort?" Gerontological Society of America

Support the Department of Sociology!

Please consider supporting the Department of Sociology as we continue building on our achievements. You can contribute to our success by making a tax deductible gift to the department. Your gift allows us to continue to offer opportunities for our students to excel academically and to conduct important research.